



NOAA *Background*

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries)

Who We Are

The National Marine Fisheries Service is dedicated to protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources through scientific research, fisheries management, enforcement, and habitat conservation. NOAA Fisheries is a leading voice for commercial and recreational fisheries and continues to focus its efforts on sustaining our marine resources as we face the challenges that the new millennium brings. Marine fisheries (which extend from state

waters to 200 miles from our shores) provide an important source of food for the nation, as well as thousands of jobs and a traditional way of life for many coastal communities. From the Gulf of Maine, to the Gulf of Mexico, and to the Gulf of Alaska, NOAA Fisheries scientists and managers work to ensure sustainable fish harvests; they are the stewards of our nation's living marine resources and their habitats.

The last few years have seen several profound legal and conceptual changes in the management landscape of the nation's marine fisheries notably, major revisions to the Marine Mammal Protection Act (1994) and the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (1996). In 2000, Congress is reviewing another major management tool, the Endangered Species Act.

Our marine resource legislation is now among the strongest in the world. The Magnuson-Stevens Act provides a wide array of protection, requiring very conservative management targets, tight time frames for rebuilding stocks, consideration of habitat impacts, reducing bycatch, and assessing economic impacts on fishing communities.

Internationally, the development of the United Nations Treaty on Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks and a major new emphasis on the use of a precautionary approach to fishery management have refocused efforts on dealing with the problems of overfishing. These national and international changes direct fishery management authorities to implement programs that end overfishing quickly and rebuild overfished resources in a timely manner.

A WORD ABOUT NOAA. . .

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) conducts research and gathers data about the global oceans, atmosphere, space, and sun, and applies this knowledge to science and service that touch the lives of all Americans.

NOAA warns of dangerous weather, charts our seas and skies, guides our use and protection of ocean and coastal resources, and conducts research to improve our understanding and stewardship of the environment which sustains us all.

A Commerce Department agency, NOAA provides these services through five major organizations: the National Weather Service, the National Ocean Service, the National Marine Fisheries Service, the National Environmental Satellite, Data and Information Service, and Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research; and numerous special program units. In addition, NOAA research and operational activities are supported by the Nation's seventh uniformed service, the NOAA Corps, a commissioned officer corps of men and women who operate NOAA ships and aircraft, and serve in scientific and administrative posts.

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What We Do

Using the tools provided by the Magnuson-Stevens Act, NOAA Fisheries assesses and predicts the status of fish stocks, ensures compliance with fisheries regulations, and works to reduce wasteful fishing practices. We promote the development of new markets such as aquaculture, products, and technologies through industry development grants and assists fishermen through government guaranteed loans, technology transfer, and economic incentives. NOAA Fisheries, in conjunction with NOAA's office of Sustainable Development and Intergovernmental Affairs, is also working closely with economically distressed fishing communities in the Northwest, Northeast, and Southeast to design comprehensive emergency economic assistance packages that aid displaced fishermen and help restore depleted fishery resources. These economic packages are a coordinated government response involving the Departments of Commerce, Labor, Agriculture, Housing and Urban Development and the Small Business Administration.

Under the guidance of the Marine Mammal Protection Act and the Endangered Species Act, NOAA Fisheries recovers protected marine species, such as sea turtles, whales, and dolphins, without unnecessarily impeding economic and recreational opportunities. We support the development of innovative management strategies and technologies to reduce potential conflicts involving protected species. NOAA Fisheries develops and implements conservation and recovery plans and works to prevent species from becoming threatened or endangered. We strive to educate the public about the dangers of interacting with these wild marine mammals and encourage them to follow responsible marine mammal viewing guidelines. We promote and support the viewing ethics behind programs such as "Watchable Wildlife," which will help to reduce the potential to

inadvertently harm marine mammals or violate Federal law while viewing these majestic animals.

We promote healthy coastal ecosystems in a way that maintains long-term fisheries productivity and promotes economic growth, recreation and tourism. NOAA Fisheries manages its activities in an ecosystem-wide approach to maintain a diversity of commercial fish species and monitors and evaluates coastal areas to provide better information for marine resource managers.

What Are the Benefits

Through effective conservation and management, the nation's living marine resources provide significant social and economic benefits. The sale of domestically caught fish and shellfish by commercial fishermen currently exceeds \$3 billion, making the U.S. the fifth-largest producer of seafood in the world. In 1998 alone, recreational anglers took more than 60 million saltwater fishing trips, catching more than 312 million fish approximately half of these fish were released alive.

NOAA Fisheries works to promote sustainable fisheries and to prevent lost economic potential associated with overfishing, declining species and degraded habitats. We strive to balance competing public needs and interests in the use and enjoyment of our ocean's resources. Through its many actions, programs, and research, NOAA Fisheries is ensuring the continued productivity and abundance of the nation's living marine resources and a bright future for the people dependent upon these resources. NOAA Fisheries' vision for the next decade is to greatly increase the nation's wealth and quality of life through building and maintaining sustainable fisheries that support fishing industry jobs, provide safe and wholesome seafood, and ensure recreational fishing opportunities. ☺

For more information contact NOAA Fisheries Public Affairs at (301) 713-2370, or visit our Web site at <http://www.nmfs.gov>.

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